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UMAN RIGHTS
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OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS
COMMISSION ON RT OF THE WORLD, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL
Fifty-fourth AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES
Agenda item 1

tatement submitted by Reporters Sans Frontières, a
nmental organization in special consultative status

QUESTIO
IN ANY tary-General has received the following written statement,
ated in accordance with Economic and Social Council
(XLIV).

Written
non-gov [14 April 1998]

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resolution 1

1. More than half of the 185 States represented in the United Nations do not respect freedom of the press. Over 10 years, more than 600 journalists have been murdered throughout the world while doing their job.

2. In Algeria, 57 journalists have been murdered since January 1992 in attacks alleged to have been committed by armed groups claiming to be Islamic fundamentalists. There has been no independent investigation of these murders, even though there are serious doubts as to the instigators of some of them. In addition, two journalists have "disappeared" after having been abducted by the forces of law and order. The authorities are also responsible for 24 cases of imprisonment and 40 cases of interrogation of journalists, as well as for 58 cases of seizure of issues of newspapers and of suspension or banning of organs of the press.

3. In Byelorussia, freedom of the press deteriorated in 1997 following the entry into office of President Lukashenka. The opposition newspaper Svaboda was banned, the correspondent of a Russian channel was expelled, and another correspondent was imprisoned.

4. In Myanmar, the authorities prohibit any press activity which they do not control. Six journalists are still held in prison in very hard conditions and they have apparently been subjected to maltreatment.

5. In 1997, the Cameroon of Paul Biya became the most repressive country in French-speaking Africa with respect to freedom of the press. Seven journalists have been imprisoned under a number of laws. In 1998, another three journalists were sentenced to imprisonment. They include Pius Njawé, editor of the independent tri-weekly review Le Messager, who was condemned to two years' imprisonment for an article reporting that the President had a heart complaint.

6. In Asia, it should not be forgotten that 11 journalists remain in prison in China, serving sentences ranging from three years to life. The press still takes its orders from the Communist Party of China.

7. The change of Government on 17 May 1997 in the former Zaire did not bring with it any change for the press. The many cases of detention and expulsion of foreign journalists decreed in his time by Mobutu have been followed by the imprisonment and other acts of repression ordered by the Government of Laurent-Désiré Kabila. Seven journalists were imprisoned in 1997 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and at least another eight were interrogated. On 25 November, 10 journalists were flogged for having attended a press conference convened by a leader of an opposition movement. In December, the offices of the review Elima were destroyed and looted by soldiers, who also occupied the premises of the monthly publication Le Moniteur de l'Economie.

8. Cuba is the only country in Latin America where there is no freedom of the press. Journalists working for independent press agencies - which are still illegal - are regarded as "traitors to the fatherland" and imprisoned. In 1997 Lorenzo Páez Núñez of the Oficina de Prensa Independiente was sentenced to 18 months in prison for "defamation of the police" and "insulting behaviour". The founder of the agency Línea Sur Press was sentenced to

six years' imprisonment for having called President Fidel Castro "untruthful". Also in 1997, 13 journalists were detained and 28 were interrogated or threatened by the forces of law and order. A further five had to leave the country after serving prison terms.

9. In Ethiopia, 20 journalists are currently under detention and as many again have been released on bail. The four most important private weeklies have been shut down by the Government of Meles Zenawi. Many independent journalists have been obliged to leave the country.

10. In Mexico, three journalists were murdered in 1997, another 30 suffered attacks, and a further 11 were threatened. Most of them had investigated cases of corruption, drugs trafficking or misuse of power. At a time when the Mexican political system is becoming more democratic, it is paradoxical that the number of journalists subjected to attacks and threats should be increasing. There are many politicians and members of the armed forces in the areas of conflict (States of Chiapas and Guerrero), as well as civil servants and drug traffickers, who attack journalists. Notwithstanding the recommendations made to the local authorities by the National Commission on Human Rights, the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of these crimes has not diminished. Five murders of journalists since 1995 remain unpunished to this day.

11. In Nigeria, the regime of General Sani Abacha inflicted even more repression on the private press in 1997. During that year, 90 journalists were detained, attacked or threatened, four times more than in the previous year. On 31 January 1998, there were three journalists in prison, four of them serving 15-year terms. This deterioration in the situation is inconsistent with the transition to democracy which the regime of General Sani Abacha claims to want to complete in time for the presidential elections planned for August 1998.

12. Turkey is still breaking ominous records in respect of attacks on freedom of the press. In 1997 alone, 20 imprisoned journalists were tortured. More than 250 of their colleagues were interrogated or detained for various periods. Reporters Sans Frontières is investigating a further 91 cases of journalists who are currently in prison.

13. Viet Nam does not respect freedom of the press. In 1997, the authorities tightened their grip on the press. Six journalists are imprisoned in work camps, most of them sharing quarters with common criminals. In 1990, the former editor of the review Dien Dan Tu Bo, Doan Viet Hoat, was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment after having been kept in detention from 1976 to 1978 without being tried or charged with any crime. He is currently being held in the Thanh Cam prison for "dangerous criminals", in solitary confinement in an old hut, and he is not allowed to read, write or communicate with the other prisoners. His "crime" was to make peaceful appeals for

democracy and respect for fundamental freedoms. His sight has apparently deteriorated very badly because he has been unable to change his spectacles. Since January 1996, he has not been allowed visits. Another of the journalists currently imprisoned in Viet Nam is Nguyen Hoang Linh, who was the editor-in-chief of the official economic newspaper Doanh Nghiep. In the spring of 1997, he committed the "error" of reporting embezzlement in the customs services. As a result, he has been in prison without trial since 6 October 1987.